



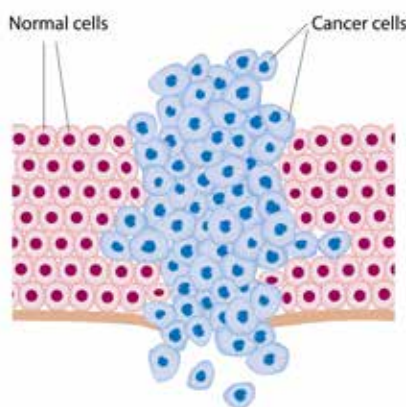
A CLOSER LOOK AT *Risk Factors for Cancer*

It is usually not possible to know exactly why one person develops cancer and another doesn't. But research has shown that certain risk factors may increase a person's chances of developing cancer. (There are also factors that are linked to a lower risk of cancer. These are sometimes called protective risk factors, or just protective factors.)

Cancer risk factors include exposure to chemicals or other substances, as well as certain behaviors. They also include things people cannot control like age and family history. A family history of certain cancers can be a sign of a possible inherited cancer syndrome.

Most cancer risk (and protective) factors are initially identified in epidemiology studies. In these studies, scientists look at large groups of people and compare those

who develop cancer with those who don't. These studies may show that the people who develop cancer are more or less likely to behave in certain ways or to be exposed to certain substances than those who do not develop cancer.



Such studies on their own cannot prove that a behavior or substance causes cancer. For example, the finding could be a result of chance, or the true risk factor could be something other than the suspected risk factor. But findings of this type sometimes get attention in the media, and this can lead to wrong ideas about how cancer starts and spreads.

When many studies all point to a similar association between a potential risk factor and an increased risk of cancer, and when a possible mechanism exists that could explain how the risk factor could actually cause cancer, scientists can be more confident about the relationship between the two.

The list below includes the most-studied known or suspected risk factors for cancer. Although some of these risk factors can be avoided, others—such as growing older—cannot. Limiting your exposure to avoidable risk factors may lower your risk of developing certain cancers.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| » Age | » Immunosuppression |
| » Alcohol | » Infectious Agents |
| » Cancer-Causing Substances | » Obesity |
| » Chronic Inflammation | » Radiation |
| » Diet | » Sunlight |
| » Hormones | » Tobacco |

COMMON CANCER QUESTIONS

Certain popular ideas about how cancer starts and spreads—though scientifically wrong—can seem to make sense, especially when those ideas are rooted in old theories. But wrong ideas about cancer can lead to needless worry and even hinder good prevention and treatment decisions. Here are some common cancer questions and the reality behind them.

Will eating sugar make my cancer worse?

No. Although research has shown that cancer cells consume more sugar (glucose) than normal cells, no studies have shown that eating sugar will make your cancer worse or that, if you stop eating sugar, your cancer will shrink

or disappear. However, a high-sugar diet may contribute to excess weight gain, and obesity is associated with an increased risk of developing several types of cancer.

Do artificial sweeteners cause cancer?

No. Researchers have conducted studies on the safety of the artificial sweeteners and found no evidence that they cause cancer in humans. All of artificial sweeteners except for cyclamate have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for sale in the United States.

Is cancer contagious?

In general, no. Cancer is not a contagious disease that easily spreads from person to person. The only situation in which cancer can spread from one person to another is in the case of organ or tissue transplantation. A person who receives an organ or tissue from a donor who had cancer in the past may be at increased risk of developing a transplant-related cancer in the future. However, that risk is extremely low.

Does my attitude—positive or negative—determine my risk of, or likely recovery from, cancer?

To date, there is no convincing scientific evidence that links a person's "attitude" to his or her risk of developing or dying from cancer. If you have cancer, it's normal to feel sad, angry, or discouraged sometimes and positive or upbeat at other times. People with a positive attitude may be more likely to maintain social connections and stay active, and physical activity and emotional support may help you cope with your cancer.



CANCER